

CHAPTER 10

TWO FORGOTTEN STATESMEN ARE PAID HOMAGE

Pages 57 – 59

(Transcribed by Jim Thoma)

Judge Roy D. Williams Revives the Might Deeds of General William H. Ashley and David Barton, Giants in their Generations.

TWO pioneer statesmen who strode as giants across the national arena are all but forgotten. Both sleep in Cooper County, one in an unmarked grave. The other died in chains, a maniac with no relative near.

Their mighty works live again, largely through the research of Judge Roy D. Williams.

Addressing Daughters of the American Revolution, Judge Williams painted a clear and colorful canvas of General William H. Ashley who eventually ACQUIRED 30,000 ARPENS OF LAND IN THE PRESENT cooper County, originally ceded by the Osages to Pierre Chouteau. An arpen, a Spanish measure is 1.28 acres. The land bordered the Lamine river.

Charles Dehaulte DeLassus, lieutenant governor of Upper Louisiana, confirmed for Spain the Indian gift, and Ashley, a member of Congress, obtained congressional confirmation July 4, 1826. Later Ashley bought the tract from Pierre Chouteau.

“WILLIAM H. ASHLEY was the first lieutenant governor of Missouri and was barely beaten for governor by Frederick Bates in 1824”, Judge Williams told his audience.

“General Ashley, a Whig, in 1831, was elected to the twenty-second Congress to fill the unexpired term of Spencer Pettis, killed by Major Thomas Biddle in a duel. General Ashley was re-elected to the twenty-third and twenty-fourth congresses. It may well be said of Ashley:

Inured to hardship – putting fear aside.
His purpose dared, while yet our coasts were new,
To press beyond the confines and to hew
The path of empire through a waste untried.

“WILLIAM H. ASHLEY of Powhattan County, Virginia, came to the Missouri Territory of Upper Louisiana, as it was called in 1803, when 18. No more picturesque character was among Missouri pioneers. He was educated, prosperous, bold and adventurous.

“He helped promote the old Bank of St. Louis and was brigadier-general of Missouri militia in the War of 1812. He founded the Rocky Mountain Fur Company and organized and personally conducted exploration and trading expeditions to the headwaters of the Missouri and into the Rockies.

“He was the first man to take a cannon to the Rocky Mountains, hauling it 1200 miles with ox teams. He set it up in a fort of his company. Many keelboats and steamboats were named for him and ‘Ashley beaver’ signified extra quality fur.

“GOVERNOR ASHLEY’S HOME overlooked the Missouri river about a mile west of the mouth of the Lamine. Indian mounds almost surrounded the site.

“When he felt death near he ordered that he be buried at the top of a mound in the bend of the ‘Great River’, the highest point in that locality. From it he had seen boats land at Boonville and Arrow Rock.

“His burial mound is in an open pasture on the Wallace farm. From its sides grow forest trees. Cattle roam upon his grave. Lowing kine, the song of a bird and the whistle of a barge two. Mellowed by distance, are unheeded as the mound stands a silent sentinel overlooking a mighty sweep of the Missouri.”

“DAVID BARTON, in animated form, was

End of Page 57

Drawn with sure, bold strokes by Judge Williams in another discourse before the D. A. R.

“To trace in detail Barton’s life is but to write the early history of his adopted state”, Judge Williams said. He was born in Tennessee, the son of an eminent divine who had crossed from Carolina.

“There were six sons. Three, of whom we find trace, were named after Biblical characters: Isaac, Joshua and David.

“DAVID BARTON, was born in 1783. As a child he heard of the framing of the Constitution, Washington, Madison, Franklin, Pinkney and Marshall were household words.

“He heard of the matchless eloquence of Patrick Henry seeking to defeat ratification in the Virginia convention and of how John Marshall, the Revolutionary soldier who became Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, prevailed for adoption of that document that has become our sacred heritage.

“When David was 10 he heard of the longings of the French people through their revolution. He knew the history of Napoleon who wrested from Spain the ground that David Barton should hallow with his bones. He was fired by the spirit of the times and inspired by the founding fathers of the republic, and ‘there were giants in those days’.

“After studying law, he and his brothers, Isaac and Joshua, in 1809, came west to St. Charles to settle in a mighty empire that a far-seeing president had bought from France.

“IMMEDIATELY David Barton took an active part in his adopted state. He was attorney general in 1813. In 1815 he became the first circuit judge of Howard, the ‘mother of counties’ that extended from the mouth of the Osage river of the east to about the present Kansas line and from the fertile prairies of Iowa to the rocky banks of the Osage.

“As a circuit judge, David Barton’s life first touched Boonville. He held the first court at Hannah Cole’s fort, whose site now is occupied by St. Joseph’s Hospital. He was 33, in the full vigor of manhood.

“One attorney in that court was his brother Joshua, later United States attorney in St. Louis and Missouri’s first secretary of state. He was killed in a duel with William G. Rector, surveyor of the Port of St. Louis.

“Charles Lucas, another lawyer, with Asa Morgan, for whom Morgan street probably was named, acquired the Site of Boonville. Lucas later was killed by Barton’s associate, Thomas Hart. Barton, in a duel on Bloody Island near St. Louis.

“BARTON was elected speaker of the first territorial house of representatives and was responsible for changing Missouri statutes from the civil law of France to the common law of England. This affects us vitally today. Under the harsh code of the civil law, property belonging to the man before marriage remained his entirely. Under the more benign common law the wife is endowed with one-third, whether acquired before or after marriage.

“Again under the code of Napoleon, customs were not considered; an edict became as the law of the Medes and Persians. Under the English system, customs of the people prevailed.

“Had David Barton made no further contribution to the welfare of Missourians, his name should be honored and his memory revered.

“In 1820, as president of the state constitutional convention in St. Louis, Barton wrote in his own hand the Constitution used until 1866. By acclamation he was chosen unanimously as Missouri’s first United States senator. For the other place there was a bitter contest. Barton was appealed to and he chose Thomas Hart Benton. From that hour David Barton’s political star began to pale.

“ANDREW JACKSON became President. He was more loved and worshiped, more hated, and feared, than any man who ever occupied the presidential chair. Those who believed with him fared well; those who opposed him were obliterated.

“Emulated King David, for whom he was named, Barton, a Whig, bent the knee to no man. Benton supported Jackson. Barton opposed him, and Jackson annihilated Barton as a national character. Not, however, without the bitterest fight from Washington to Missouri; not until Barton had sown the seed that grew and ripened into repudiation of Benton.

”After Barton’s defeat for United States senator he was elected from St. Louis to the Missouri state senate, the only man in Missouri history to occupy in this succession those positions.

“Barton never married. A habit of inebriety, formed in youth, grew and, after his term in the state senate, he came to Boonville broken in body and old in mind.

End of Page 58

“WILLIAM GIBSON, grandfather of Mrs. George T. Irvine of Boonville, showing that friendship so rare, took him into his home and ministered unto him. Barton became a raving maniac. After a time God set his panting spirit free.

“In life he was just, brave, true. He fulfilled his destiny. He left no family. No relative was with him at the end. Where his body reposes under the daisied sod in Walnut Grove Cemetery, a marble shaft erected by a grateful people bears the epitaph, ‘A profound jurist, an honest and able statesman, a just and benevolent man’.

“his career illustrates ‘The stream of life’ portrayed by a senator of the United States at the grave of his friend, that illustrious Missouri, Champ Clark:

“A wonderful stream is the river of life. A slender thread emerges from the mysterious realm of birth and goes laughing and dancing through the wonder world of childhood. Its broadening currents sweep the plains of youth between flower-decked hills of romance and hope. A might torrent, it rushes over the rapids of manhood, dashing itself into foam upon the rocks of opposition and defeat, then silently glides across the barren and sterile fields of age until it is engulfed and lost with the waters of the eternal sea.”

FRONTIER GOVERNMENT WAS VERY SIMPLE

DURING earliest settlement of the Cooper County area there was no crime except by occasional marauding Indians. Distant settlers were ‘neighbors,’ all cooperating for mutual protection.

Frontier families lived under *the perfect law of liberty*. A simple understanding of right and wrong prevailed.

The territorial laws were extended over this region in 1816 and on January 23 that year Howard County was formed. It included all the Boon’s Lick Country – that part of Missouri north and west of the Osage river and west of Cedar creek and the dividing ridge between the Missouri and Mississippi rivers.

THE NEW, sparsely settled country was rich in game, timber and virgin soil but money was scarce. Government performed only fundamental services, taxes were light and officials received small pay.

In 1817 the territorial court appointed William Gibson of Boonville constable for the district south of the Missouri river. He was down on the Osage to arrest a man.

Returning with his prisoner, he stopped with a execution to levy on feather beds at the cabin of a debtor. The owner was away but four hostile women, as rough as the country, chased Mr. Gibson, threatening to thrash him.

THE COURT allowed him *25 cents for his 140-mile trip* that required four days. He resigned.

December 17, 1818, Cooper County was organized. It comprised all the Howard south of the Missouri. It extended to the Osage and to the “territorial line,” near the present Kansas line, comprising what is now 11 counties and parts of five others.

In 1821, John V. Sharp, veteran of the Revolution, became paralyzed. Having no means or kin, he became a public charge. His board and shelter cost the county \$2 a day, besides medical fees.

In 1822 the county court petitioned the general assembly for the state to support him, *as the entire revenue of the county was less than the cost of supporting this one pauper*, \$730 a year. The county’s total revenue in 1822 was \$718. The petition was not granted. The county then levied special taxes from 1823 of 50 per cent of the state tax until 1828, when it was cut to 10 per cent. Sharp died that year.

End of Page 59

End of Chapter 10

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